

RETURN

(40d)

SPEECHES DELIVERED IN IMPERIAL HOUSE OF COMMONS IN AUGUST, 1914, RELATIVE TO GREAT BRITAIN AND EUROPEAN POWERS.

STATEMENT BY SIR EDWARD GREY.

The SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS (Sir Edward Grey): Last week I stated that we were working for peace not only for this country, but to preserve the peace of Europe. To-day events move so rapidly that it is exceedingly difficult to state with technical accuracy the actual state of affairs, but it is clear that the peace of Europe cannot be preserved. Russia and Germany, at any rate, have declared war upon each other.

Before I proceed to state the position of His Majesty's Government, I would like to clear the ground so that, before I come to state to the House what our attitude is with regard to the present crisis, the House may know exactly under what obligations the Government is, or the House can be said to be, in coming to a decision on the matter. First of all let me say, very shortly, that we have consistently worked with a single mind, with all the earnestness in our power, to preserve peace. The House may be satisfied on that point. We have always done it. During these last years, as far as His Majesty's Government are concerned, we would have no difficulty in proving that we have done so. Throughout the Balkan crisis, by general admission, we worked for peace. The co-operation of the Great Powers of Europe was successful in working for peace in the Balkan crisis. It is true that some of the Powers had great difficulty in adjusting their points of view. It took much time and labour and discussion before they could settle their differences, but peace was secured, because peace was their main object, and they were willing to give time and trouble rather than accentuate differences rapidly.

In the present crisis, it has not been possible to secure the peace of Europe; because there has been little time, and there has been a disposition—at any rate in some quarters on which I will not dwell—to force things rapidly to an issue, at any rate, to the great risk of peace, and, as we now know, the result of that is that the policy of peace, as far as the Great Powers generally are concerned, is in danger. I do not want to dwell on that, and to comment on it, and to say where the blame seems to us to lie, which Powers were most in favour of peace, which were most disposed to risk or endanger peace, because I would like the House to approach this crisis in which we are now, from the point of view of British interests, British honour, and British obligations, free from all passion as to why peace has not been preserved.

We shall publish Papers as soon as we can regarding what took place last week when we were working for peace; and when those Papers are published, I have no doubt that to every human being they will make it clear how strenuous and genuine and whole-hearted our efforts for peace were, and that they will enable people to form their own judgment as to what forces were at work which operated against peace.

I come first, now, to the question of British obligations. I have assured the House—and the Prime Minister has assured the House more than once—that if any crisis such as this arose, we should come before the House of Commons and be able to say to the House that it was free to decide what the British attitude should be, that we would have no secret engagement which we should spring upon the House, and tell

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the House that, because we had entered into that engagement, there was an obligation of honour upon the country. I will deal with that point to clear the ground first.

There has been in Europe two diplomatic groups, the Triple Alliance and what came to be called the "Triple Entente," for some years past. The Triple Entente was not an Alliance—it was a Diplomatic group. The House will remember that in 1908 there was a crisis, also a Balkan crisis, originating in the annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The Russian Minister, M. Isvolsky, came to London, or happened to come to London, because his visit was planned before the crisis broke out. I told him definitely then, this being a Balkan crisis, a Balkan affair, I did not consider that public opinion in this country would justify us in promising to give anything more than diplomatic support. More was never asked from us, more was never given, and more was never promised.

In this present crisis, up till yesterday, we have also given no promise of anything more than diplomatic support—up till yesterday no promise of more than diplomatic support. Now I must make this question of obligation clear to the House. I must go back to the first Moroccan crisis of 1906. That was the time of the Algeciras Conference, and it came at a time of very great difficulty to His Majesty's Government when a General Election was in progress, and Ministers were scattered over the country, and I—spending three days a week in my constituency and three days at the Foreign Office—was asked the question whether if that crisis developed into war between France and Germany we would give armed support. I said then that I could promise nothing to any foreign Power unless it was subsequently to receive the whole-hearted support of public opinion here if the occasion arose. I said, in my opinion, if war was forced upon France, then on the question of Morocco—a question which had just been the subject of agreement between this country and France, an agreement exceedingly popular on both sides—that if out of that agreement war was forced on France at that time, in my view public opinion in this country would have rallied to the material support of France.

I gave no promise, but I expressed that opinion during the crisis, as far as I remember, almost in the same words, to the French Ambassador and the German Ambassador at the time. I made no promise, and I used no threats; but I expressed that opinion. That position was accepted by the French Government, but they said to me at the time—and I think very reasonably "If you think it possible that the public opinion of Great Britain might, should a sudden crisis arise, justify you in giving to France the armed support which you cannot promise in advance, you will not be able to give that support, even if you wish to give it, when the time comes, unless some "conversations have already taken place between naval and military experts." There was force in that. I agreed to it, and authorised those conversations to take place, but on the distinct understanding that nothing which passed between military or naval experts should bind either Government or restrict in any way their freedom to make a decision as to whether or not they would give that support when the time arose.

As I have told the House, upon that occasion a General Election was in prospect. I had to take the responsibility of doing that without the Cabinet. It could not be summoned. An answer had to be given. I consulted Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, the Prime Minister; I consulted, I remember, Lord Haldane, who was then Secretary of State for War, and the present Prime Minister, who was then Chancellor of the Exchequer. That was the most I could do, and they authorised that on the distinct understanding that it left the hands of the Government free whenever the crisis arose. The fact that conversations between military and naval experts took place was later on—I think much later on, because that crisis passed, and the thing ceased to be of importance—but later on it was brought to the knowledge of the Cabinet.

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The Agadir crisis came—another Morocco crisis—and throughout that I took precisely the same line that had been taken in 1906. But subsequently, in 1912, after discussion and consideration in the Cabinet it was decided that we ought to have a definite understanding in writing, which was to be only in the form of an unofficial letter, that these conversations which took place were not binding upon the freedom of either Government; and on the 22nd of November, 1912, I wrote to the French Ambassador the letter which I will now read to the House, and I received from him a letter in similar terms in reply. The letter which I have to read to the House is this, and it will be known to the public now as the record that, whatever took place between military and naval experts, they were not binding engagements upon the Government:—

“My dear Ambassador,—From time to time in recent years the French and British naval and military experts have consulted together. It has always been understood that such consultation does not restrict the freedom of either Government to decide at any future time whether or not to assist the other by armed force. We have agreed that consultation between experts is not and ought not to be regarded as an engagement that commits either Government to action in a contingency that has not yet arisen and may never arise. The disposition, for instance, of the French and British Fleets respectively at the present moment is not based upon an engagement to co-operate in war.

“You have, however, pointed out that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, it might become essential to know whether it could in that event depend upon the armed assistance of the other.

“I agree that, if either Government had grave reason to expect an unprovoked attack by a third Power, or something that threatened the general peace, it should immediately discuss with the other whether both Governments should act together to prevent aggression and to preserve peace, and, if so, what measures they would be prepared to take in common.”

LORD CHARLES BERESFORD: What is the date of that?

SIR E. GREY: The 22nd November, 1912. That is the starting point for the Government with regard to the present crisis. I think it makes it clear that what the Prime Minister and I said to the House of Commons was perfectly justified, and that, as regards our freedom to decide in a crisis what our line should be, whether we should intervene or whether we should abstain, the Government remained perfectly free and, *a fortiori*, the House of Commons remains perfectly free. That I say to clear the ground from the point of view of obligation. I think it was due to prove our good faith to the House of Commons that I should give that full information to the House now, and say what I think is obvious from the letter I have just read, that we do not construe anything which has previously taken place in our diplomatic relations with other Powers in this matter as restricting the freedom of the Government to decide what attitude they should take now, or restrict the freedom of the House of Commons to decide what their attitude should be.

Well, Sir, I will go further, and I will say this: The situation in the present crisis is not precisely the same as it was in the Morocco question. In the Morocco question it was primarily a dispute which concerned France—a dispute which concerned France and France primarily—a dispute, as it seemed to us, affecting France, out of an agreement subsisting between us and France, and published to the whole world, in which we are engaged to give France diplomatic support. No doubt we were pledged to give nothing but diplomatic support; we were, at any rate, pledged by a definite public agreement to stand with France diplomatically in that question.

The present crisis has originated differently. It has not originated with regard to Morocco. It has not originated as regards anything with which we had a special agreement with France; it has not originated with anything which primarily con-

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cerned France. It has originated in a dispute between Austria and Servia. I can say this with the most absolute confidence—no Government and no country has less desire to be involved in war over a dispute with Austria and Servia than the Government and the country of France. They are involved in it because of their obligation of honour under a definite alliance with Russia. Well, it is only fair to say to the House that that obligation of honour cannot apply in the same way to us. We are not parties to the Franco-Russian Alliance. We do not even know the terms of that Alliance. So far I have, I think, faithfully and completely cleared the ground with regard to the question of obligation.

I now come to what we think the situation requires of us. For many years we have had a long-standing friendship with France. (An hon. Member: "And with Germany!") I remember well the feeling in the House—and my own feeling—for I spoke on the subject, I think, when the late Government made their agreement with France—the warm and cordial feeling resulting from the fact that these two nations, who had had perpetual differences in the past, had cleared these differences away. I remember saying, I think, that it seemed to me that some benign influence had been at work to produce the cordial atmosphere that had made that possible. But how far that friendship entails obligation—it has been a friendship between the nations and ratified by the nations—how far that entails an obligation let every man look into his own heart, and his own feelings, and construe the extent of the obligation for himself. I construe it myself as I feel it, but I do not wish to urge upon anyone else more than their feelings dictate as to what they should feel about the obligation. The House, individually and collectively may judge for itself. I speak my personal view, and I have given the House my own feeling in the matter.

The French fleet is now in the Mediterranean, and the Northern and Western coasts of France are absolutely undefended. The French fleet being concentrated in the Mediterranean the situation is very different from what it used to be, because the friendship which has grown up between the two countries has given them a sense of security that there was nothing to be feared from us.

The French coasts are absolutely undefended. The French fleet is in the Mediterranean, and has for some years been concentrated there because of the feeling of confidence and friendship which has existed between the two countries. My own feeling is that if a foreign fleet engaged in a war which France had not sought, and in which she had not been the aggressor, came down the English Channel and bombarded and battered the undefended coasts of France, we could not stand aside and see this going on practically within sight of our eyes, with our arms folded, looking on dispassionately, doing nothing! I believe that would be the feeling of this country. There are times when one feels that if these circumstances actually did arise, it would be a feeling which would spread with irresistible force throughout the land.

But I also want to look at the matter without sentiment, and from the point of view of British interests, and it is on that I am going to base and justify what I am presently going to say to the House. If we say nothing at this moment, what is France to do with her fleet in the Mediterranean? If she leaves it there, with no statement from us as to what we will do, she leaves her Northern and Western coasts absolutely undefended, at the mercy of a German fleet coming down the Channel, to do as it pleases in a war which is a war of life and death between them. If we say nothing, it may be that the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean. We are in the presence of a European conflagration; can anybody set limits to the consequences that may arise out of it. Let us assume that to-day we stand aside in an attitude of neutrality, saying, "No, we cannot undertake and engage to help either party in this conflict." Let us suppose the French fleet is withdrawn from the Mediterranean; and let us assume that the consequences—which are already tremendous in what has happened in Europe even to countries which are at peace—in fact, equally whether countries are at peace or at war—let us assume that out of that come consequences unforeseen, which make it

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necessary at a sudden moment that, in defence of vital British interests, we should go to war; and let us assume—which is quite possible—that Italy, who is now neutral—(Hon. Members: “Hear, hear!”)—because, as I understand, she considers that this war is an aggressive war, and the Triple Alliance being a defensive alliance her obligation did not arise—let us assume that consequences which are not yet foreseen—and which perfectly legitimately consulting her own interests—make Italy depart from her attitude of neutrality at a time when we are forced in defence of vital British interests ourselves to fight, what then will be the position in the Mediterranean? It might be that at some critical moment those consequences would be forced upon us because our trade routes in the Mediterranean might be vital to this country?

Nobody can say that in the course of the next few weeks there is any particular trade route the keeping open of which may not be vital to this country. What will be our position then? We have not kept a fleet in the Mediterranean which is equal to dealing alone with a combination of other fleets in the Mediterranean. It would be the very moment when we could not detach more ships to the Mediterranean, and we might have exposed this country from our negative attitude at the present moment to the most appalling risk. I say that from the point of view of British interests. We feel strongly that France was entitled to know—and to know at once!—whether or not in the event of attack upon her unprotected Northern and Western Coasts she could depend upon British support. In that emergency, and in these compelling circumstances, yesterday afternoon I gave to the French Ambassador the following statement:—

“I am authorised to give an assurance that if the German fleet comes into the channel or through the North Sea to undertake hostile operations against the French coasts or shipping, the British fleet will give all the protection in its power. This assurance is, of course, subject to the policy of His Majesty’s Government receiving the support of Parliament, and must not be taken as binding His Majesty’s Government to take any action until the above contingency of action by the German fleet takes place.”

I read that to the House, not as a declaration of war on our part, not as entailing immediate aggressive action on our part, but as binding us to take aggressive action should that contingency arise. Things move very hurriedly from hour to hour. Fresh news comes in and I cannot give this in any very formal way; but I understand that the German Government would be prepared, if we would pledge ourselves to neutrality, to agree that its fleet would not attack the Northern coast of France. I have only heard that shortly before I came to the House, but it is far too narrow an engagement for us. And, Sir, there is the more serious consideration becoming more serious every hour—there is the question of the neutrality of Belgium.

I shall have to put before the House at some length what is our position in regard to Belgium. The governing factor is the Treaty of 1839, but this is a Treaty with a history—a history accumulated since. In 1870, when there was war between France and Germany, the question of the neutrality of Belgium arose, and various things were said. Amongst other things, Prince Bismarck gave an assurance to Belgium that, confirming his verbal assurance, he gave in writing a declaration which he said was superfluous in reference to the Treaty in existence—that the German Confederation and its allies would respect the neutrality of Belgium, it being always understood that that neutrality would be respected by the other belligerent Powers. That is valuable as a recognition in 1870 on the part of Germany of the sacredness of these Treaty rights.

What was our own attitude? The people who laid down the attitude of the British Government were Lord Granville in the House of Lords, and Mr. Gladstone in the House of Commons. Lord Granville, on the 8th of August, 1870, used these words. He said:—

“We might have explained to the country and to foreign nations that we did not think this country was bound either morally or internationally or that

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its interests were concerned in the maintenance of the neutrality of Belgium, though this course might have had some convenience, though it might have been easy to adhere to it, though it might have saved us from some immediate danger, it is a course which Her Majesty's Government thought it impossible to adopt in the name of the country with any due regard to the country's honour or to the country's interests."

Mr. Gladstone spoke as follows two days later:—

"There is, I admit, the obligation of the Treaty. It is not necessary, nor would time permit me, to enter into the complicated question of the nature of the obligations of that Treaty; but I am not able to subscribe to the doctrine of those who have held in this House what plainly amounts to an assertion, that the simple fact of the existence of a guarantee is binding on every party to it, irrespectively altogether of the particular position in which it may find itself at the time when the occasion for acting on the grantee arises. The great authorities upon foreign policy to whom I have been accustomed to listen, such as Lord Aberdeen and Lord Palmerston, never to my knowledge took that rigid and, if I may venture to say so, that impracticable view of the guarantee. The circumstance that there is already an existing guarantee in force is of necessity an important fact, and a weighty element in the case to which we are bound to give full and ample consideration. There is also this further consideration, the force of which we must all feel most deeply, and that is, the common interests against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power whatever."

The Treaty is an old Treaty—1839—and that was the view taken of it in 1870. It is one of those Treaties which are founded, not only on consideration for Belgium, which benefits under the Treaty, but in the interests of those who guarantee the neutrality of Belgium. The honour and interests are, at least, as strong to-day as in 1870, and we cannot take a more narrow view or a less serious view of our obligations, and of the importance of those obligations than was taken by Mr. Gladstone's Government in 1870.

I will read to the House what took place last week on this subject. When mobilisation was beginning, I knew that question must be a most important element in our policy—a most important subject for the House of Commons. I telegraphed at the same time in similar terms to both Paris and Berlin to say that it was essential for us to know whether the French and German Governments respectively were prepared to undertake an engagement to respect the neutrality of Belgium. These are the replies. I got from the French Government this reply:—

"The French Government are resolved to respect the neutrality of Belgium, and it would only be in the event of some other Power violating that neutrality that France might find herself under the necessity, in order to assure the defence of her security, to act otherwise. This assurance has been given several times. The President of the Republic spoke of it to the King of the Belgians, and the French Minister at Brussels has spontaneously renewed the assurance to the Belgian Minister of Foreign Affairs to-day."

From the German Government the reply was:—

"The Secretary of State, for Foreign Affairs could not possibly give an answer before consulting the Emperor and the Imperial Chancellor."

Sir Edward Goschen, to whom I had said it was important to have an answer soon, said he hoped the answer would not be too long delayed. The German Minister for Foreign Affairs then gave Sir Edward Goschen to understand that he rather doubted whether they could answer at all, as any reply they might give could not fail, in the event of war, to have the undesirable effect of disclosing, to a certain extent, part of their plan of campaign. I telegraphed at the same time to Brussels to the Belgian Government, and I got the following reply from Sir Francis Villiers:—

"The Minister for Foreign Affairs thanks me for the communication, and replies that Belgium will, to the utmost of her power, maintain neutrality, and

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expects and desires other Powers to observe and uphold it. He begged me to add that the relations between Belgium and the neighbouring Powers were excellent, and there was no reason to suspect their intentions, but that the Belgian Government believe, in the case of violation, they were in a position to defend the neutrality of their country."

It now appears from the news I have received to-day—which has come quite recently, and I am not yet quite sure how far it has reached me in an accurate form—that an ultimatum has been given to Belgium by Germany, the object of which was to offer Belgium friendly relations with Germany on condition that she would facilitate the passage of German troops through Belgium. Well, Sir, until one has these things absolutely definitely, up to the last moment, I do not wish to say all that one would say if one were in a position to give the House full, complete, and absolute information upon the point. We were sounded in the course of last week as to whether if a guarantee were given that, after the war, Belgium integrity would be preserved that would content us. We replied that we could not bargain away whatever interests or obligations we had in Belgian neutrality.

Shortly before I reached the House I was informed that the following telegram had been received from the King of the Belgians by our King—King George:—

"Remembering the numerous proofs of your Majesty's friendship and that of your predecessors, and the friendly attitude of England in 1870, and the proof of friendship she has just given us again, I make a supreme appeal to the Diplomatic intervention of your Majesty's Government to safeguard the integrity of Belgium."

Diplomatic intervention took place last week on our part. What can diplomatic intervention do now? We have great vital interests in the independence—and integrity is the least part—of Belgium. If Belgium is compelled to submit to allow her neutrality to be violated, of course the situation is clear. Even if by agreement she admitted the violation of her neutrality, it is clear she could only do so under duress. The smaller States in that region of Europe ask but one thing. Their one desire is that they should be left alone and independent. The one thing they fear is, I think, not so much that their integrity but that their independence should be interfered with. If in this war which is before Europe the neutrality of one of those countries is violated, if the troops of one of the combatants violate its neutrality and no action be taken to resent it, at the end of the war, whatever the integrity may be, the independence will be gone.

I have one further quotation from Mr. Gladstone as to what he thought about the independence of Belgium. It will be found in "Hansard," Volume 203, Page 1787. I have not had time to read the whole speech and verify the context, but the thing seems to me so clear that no context could make any difference to the meaning of it. Mr. Gladstone said:—

"We have an interest in the independence of Belgium which is wider than that which we may have in the literal operation of the guarantee. It is found in the answer to the question whether under the circumstances of the case, this country, endowed as it is with influence and power, would quietly stand by and witness the perpetration of the direst crime that ever stained the pages of history, and thus become participators in the sin."

No, Sir, if it be the case that there has been anything in the nature of an ultimatum to Belgium, asking her to compromise or violate her neutrality, whatever may have been offered to her in return, her independence is gone if that holds. If her independence goes, the independence of Holland will follow. I ask the House from the point of view of British interests, to consider what may be at stake. If France is beaten in a struggle of life and death, beaten to her knees, loses her position as a great Power, becomes subordinate to the will and power of one greater than herself—con-

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sequences which I do not anticipate, because I am sure that France has the power to defend herself with all the energy and ability and patriotism which she has shown so often—still, if that were to happen, and if Belgium fell under the same dominating influence, and then Holland, and then Denmark, then would not Mr. Gladstone's words come true, that just opposite to us there would be a common interest against the unmeasured aggrandisement of any Power?

It may be said, I suppose, that we might stand aside, husband our strength, and that whatever happened in the course of this war at the end of it intervene with effect to put things right, and to adjust them to our own point of view. If, in a crisis like this, we run away from those obligations of honour and interest as regards the Belgian Treaty, I doubt whether, whatever material force we might have at the end, it would be of very much value in face of the respect that we should have lost. And do not believe, whether a great Power stands outside this war or not, it is going to be in a position at the end of it to exert its superior strength. For us, with a powerful Fleet, which we believe able to protect our commerce, to protect our shores, and to protect our interests, if we are engaged in war, we shall suffer but little more than we shall suffer even if we stand aside.

We are going to suffer, I am afraid, terribly in this war whether we are in it or whether we stand aside. Foreign trade is going to stop, not because the trade routes are closed, but because there is no trade at the other end. Continental nations engaged in war—all their populations, all their energies, all their wealth, engaged in a desperate struggle—they cannot carry on the trade with us that they are carrying on in times of peace, whether we are parties to the war or whether we are not. I do not believe for a moment, that at the end of this war, even if we stood aside and remained aside, we should be in a position, a material position, to use our force decisively to undo what had happened in the course of the war, to prevent the whole of the West of Europe opposite to us—if that had been the result of the war—falling under the domination of a single Power, and I am quite sure that our moral position would be such as to have lost us respect. I can only say that I have put the question of Belgium somewhat hypothetically, because I am not yet sure of all the facts, but, if the facts turn out to be as they have reached us at present, it is quite clear that there is an obligation on this country to do its utmost to prevent the consequences to which those facts will lead if they are undisputed.

I have read to the House the only engagements that we have yet taken definitely with regard to the use of force. I think it is due to the House to say that we have taken no engagement yet with regard to sending Expeditionary armed force out of the country. Mobilization of the Fleet has taken place; mobilization of the Army is taking place; but we have as yet taken no engagement, because I do not feel that in the case of a European conflagration such as this, unprecedented, with our enormous responsibilities in India and other parts of the Empire, or in countries in British occupation, with all the unknown factors, we must take very carefully into consideration the use which we make of sending an Expeditionary Force out of the country until we know how we stand. One thing I would say.

The one bright spot in the whole of this terrible situation is Ireland. The general feeling throughout Ireland—and I would like this to be clearly understood abroad—does not make the Irish question a consideration which we feel we have now to take into account. I have told the House how far we have at present gone in commitments and the conditions which influence our policy, and I have put to the House and dwelt at length upon how vital is the condition of the neutrality of Belgium.

What other policy is there before the House? There is but one way in which the Government could make certain at the present moment of keeping outside this war, and that would be that it should immediately issue a proclamation of unconditional neutrality. We cannot do that. We have made the commitment to France that I

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have read to the House which prevents us from doing that. We have got the consideration of Belgium which prevents us also from any unconditional neutrality, and, without those conditions absolutely satisfied and satisfactory, we are bound not to shrink from proceeding to the use of all the forces in our power. If we did take that line by saying, "We will have nothing whatever to do with this matter" under no conditions—the Belgian Treaty obligations, the possible position in the Mediterranean, with damage to British interests, and what may happen to France from our failure to support France—if we were to say that all those things mattered nothing, were as nothing, and to say we would stand aside, we should, I believe, sacrifice our respect and good name and reputation before the world, and should not escape the most serious and grave economic consequences.

My object has been to explain the view of the Government, and to place before the House the issue and the choice. I do not for a moment conceal, after what I have said, and after the information, incomplete as it is, that I have given to the House with regard to Belgium, that we must be prepared, and we are prepared, for the consequences of having to use all the strength we have at any moment—we know not how soon—to defend ourselves and to take our part. We know, if the facts all be as I have stated them, though I have announced no intending aggressive action on our part, no final decision to resort to force at a moment's notice, until we know the whole of the case, that the use of it may be forced upon us. As far as the forces of the Crown are concerned, we are ready. I believe the Prime Minister and my right hon. Friend the First Lord of the Admiralty have no doubt whatever that the readiness and the efficiency of those Forces were never at a higher mark than they are to-day, and never was there a time when confidence was more justified in the power of the Navy to protect our commerce and to protect our shores. The thought is with us always of the suffering and misery entailed from which no country in Europe will escape abstention, and from which no neutrality will save us. The amount of harm that can be done by an enemy ship to our trade is infinitesimal, compared with the amount of harm that must be done by the economic condition that is caused on the Continent.

The most awful responsibility is resting upon the Government in deciding what to advise the House of Commons to do. We have disclosed our mind to the House of Commons. We have disclosed the issue, the information which we have, and made clear to the House, I trust, that we are prepared to face that situation, and that should it develop, as probably it may develop, we will face it. We worked for peace up to the last moment, and beyond the last moment. How hard, how persistently, and how earnestly we strove for peace last week, the House will see from the Papers that will be before it.

But that is over, as far as the peace of Europe is concerned. We are now face to face with a situation and all the consequences which it may yet have to unfold. We believe we shall have the support of the House at large in proceeding to whatever the consequences may be and whatever measures may be forced upon us by the development of facts or action taken by others. I believe the country, so quickly has the situation been forced upon it, has not had time to realize the issue. It perhaps is still thinking of the quarrel between Austria and Servia, and not the complications of this matter which have grown out of the quarrel between Austria and Servia. Russia and Germany we know are at war. We do not yet know officially that Austria, the ally whom Germany is to support, is yet at war with Russia. We know that a good deal has been happening on the French frontier. We do not know that the German Ambassador has left Paris.

The situation has developed so rapidly that technically, as regards the condition of the war, it is most difficult to describe what has actually happened. I wanted to bring out the underlying issues which would affect our own conduct, and our own policy, and to put them clearly. I have put the vital facts before the House, and if,

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as seems not improbable, we are forced, and rapidly forced, to take our stand upon those issues, then I believe, when the country realises what is at stake, what the real issues are, the magnitude of the impending dangers in the West of Europe, which I have endeavoured to describe to the House, we shall be supported throughout, not only by the House of Commons, but by the determination, the resolution, the courage, and the endurance of the whole country.

Mr. BONAR LAW: The right hon. Gentleman has made an appeal for support, and it is necessary I should say a word or two. They shall be very few. I wish to say, in the first place, that I do not believe there is a single Member of this House who doubts that, not only the right hon. Gentleman himself, but the Government which he represents, have done everything in their power up to the last moment to preserve peace, and I think we may be sure that, if any other course is taken, it is because it is forced upon them, and that they have absolutely no alternative. One thing only, further, I would like to say. The right hon. Gentleman spoke of the bright spot in the picture which only a day or two ago was a black spot on the political horizon. Everything he has said I am sure is true. I should like to say, further, that if the contingencies, which he has not put into words, but which are all in our minds as possible, arise, then we have already had indications that there is another bright spot, and that every one of His Majesty's Dominions beyond the Seas will be behind us in whatever action it is necessary to take. This only I shall add: The Government already know, but I give them now the assurance on behalf of the party of which I am Leader in this House, that in whatever steps they think it necessary to take for the honour and security of this country, they can rely on the unhesitating support of the Opposition.

The PRIME MINISTER (Mr. Asquith): In asking the House to agree to the resolution which Mr. Speaker has just read from the Chair, I do not propose, because I do not think it is in any way necessary to traverse the ground again which was covered by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary two or three nights ago. He stated—and I do not think any of the statements he made are capable of answer and certainly have not yet been answered—the grounds upon which with the utmost reluctance and with infinite regret His Majesty's Government have been compelled to put this country in a state of war with what for many years and indeed generations past has been a friendly Power. But, Sir, the papers which have since been presented to Parliament, and which are now in the hands of hon. Members will, I think, show how strenuous, how unremitting, how persistent, even when the last glimmer of hope seemed to have faded away, were the efforts of my right hon. Friend to secure for Europe an honourable and a lasting peace. Everyone knows in the great crisis which occurred last year in the East of Europe, it was largely if not mainly, by the acknowledgment of all Europe due to the steps taken by my right hon. Friend that the area of the conflict was limited, and that so far as the great Powers are concerned, peace was maintained. If his efforts upon this occasion have, unhappily, been less successful, I am certain that this House and the country, and I will add posterity and history will accord to him what is, after all, the best tribute that can be paid to any statesman: that, never derogating for an instant or by an inch from the honour and interests of his own country, he has striven, as few men have striven, to maintain and preserve the greatest interest of all countries—universal peace. These papers which are now in the hands of hon. Members show something more than that. They show what were the terms which were offered to us in exchange for our neutrality. I trust that not only the Members of this House, but all our fellow-subjects everywhere will read the communications, will read, learn and mark the communications which passed only a week ago to-day between Berlin and London in this matter. The terms by which it was sought to buy our neutrality are contained in the communication made by the German Chancellor to Sir Edward Goschen on the 29th July, No. 85 of the published Paper. I think I must refer to them for a moment. After referring to the state of things as between Austria and Russia, Sir Edward Goschen goes on:—

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"He then proceeded to make the following strong bid for British neutrality. He said that it was clear, so far as he was able to judge the main principle which governed British policy, that Great Britain would never stand by and allow France to be crushed in any conflict there might be. That, however, was not the object at which Germany aimed. Provided that neutrality of Great Britain were certain, every assurance would be given to the British Government"—

Let the House observe these words——

"Aimed at no territorial acquisition at the expense of France should they prove victorious in any war that might ensue."

Sir Edward Goschen proceeded to put a very pertinent question:—

"I questioned His Excellency about the French colonies"—

What are the French colonies? They mean every part of the dominions and possessions of France outside the geographical area of Europe—

"and he said that he was unable to give a similar undertaking in that respect."

Let me come to what, in my mind, personally, has always been the crucial and almost the governing consideration, namely, the position of the small States:—

"As regards Holland, however, His Excellency said that so long as Germany's adversaries respected the integrity and neutrality of the Netherlands, Germany was ready to give His Majesty's Government an assurance that she would do likewise."

Then we come to Belgium:—

"It depended upon the action of France what operations Germany might be forced to enter upon in Belgium, but when the war was over, Belgian integrity would be respected if she had not sided against Germany."

Let the House observe the distinction between those two cases. In regard to Holland it was not only independence and integrity but also neutrality; but in regard to Belgium, there was no mention of neutrality at all, nothing but an assurance that after the war came to an end the integrity of Belgium would be respected. Then His Excellency added:—

"Ever since he had been Chancellor the object of his policy had been to bring about an understanding with England. He trusted that these assurances"—

the assurances I have read out to the House——

"might form the basis of that understanding which he so much desired."

What does that amount to? Let me just ask the House. I do so, not with the object of inflaming passion, certainly not with the object of exciting feeling against Germany, but I do so to vindicate and make clear the position of the British Government in this matter. What did that proposal amount to? In the first place, it meant this: That behind the back of France—they were not made a party to these communications—we should have given, if we had assented to that, a free license to Germany to annex, in the event of a successful war, the whole of the extra European dominions and possessions of France. What did it mean as regards Belgium? When she addressed, as she has addressed in these last few days, her moving appeal to us to fulfil our solemn guarantee of her neutrality, what reply should we have given? What reply should we have given to that Belgian appeal? We should have been obliged to say that without her knowledge we had bartered away to the Power threatening her our obligation to keep our plighted word. The House has read, and the country has read, of course, in the last few hours, the most pathetic appeal addressed by the King of Belgium, and I do not envy the man who can read that appeal with an unmoved heart. Belgium are fighting and losing their lives. What

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would have been the position of Great Britain to-day in the face of that spectacle if we had assisted to this infamous proposal? Yes, and what are we to get in return for the betrayal of our friends and the dishonour of our obligations? What are we to get in return? A promise—nothing more; a promise as to what Germany would do in certain eventualities; a promise, be it observed—I am sorry to have to say it, but it must be put upon record—given by a Power which was at that very moment announcing its intention to violate its own treaty, and inviting us to do the same. I can only say, if we had dallied or temporized, we, as a Government, should have covered ourselves with dishonour, and we should have betrayed the interests of this country, of which we are trustees. I am glad, and I think the country will be glad, to turn to the reply which my right hon. friend made, and of which I will read to the House two of the more salient passages. This document No. 101 of my Paper, puts on record a week ago the attitude of the British Government, and, as I believe, of the British people. My right hon. friend says:—

“His Majesty’s Government cannot for a moment entertain the Chancellor’s proposal that they should bind themselves to neutrality on such terms. What he asks in effect is to engage to stand by while French Colonies are taken if France is beaten, so long as Germany does not take French territory as distinct from the Colonies. From the material point of view”—

My right hon. Friend, as he always does, used very temperate language:—

“such a proposal is unacceptable, for France, without further territory in Europe being taken from her, could be so crushed as to lose her position as a great Power, and become subordinate to German policy.”

That is the material aspect. But he proceeded:—

“Altogether apart from that, it would be a disgrace for us to make this bargain with Germany at the expense of France, a disgrace from which the good name of this country would never recover. The Chancellor also in effect asks us to bargain away whatever obligation or interest we have as regards the neutrality of Belgium. We could not entertain that bargain either.”

He then says:—

“We must preserve our full freedom to act, as circumstances may seem to us to require.”

And he added, I think, in sentences which I think the House will appreciate:—

“You should . . . add most earnestly that the one way of maintaining the good relations between England and Germany is that they should continue to work together to preserve the peace of Europe. . . For that object this Government will work in that way with all sincerity and good-will.

“If the peace of Europe can be preserved and the present crisis safely passed, my own endeavour will be to promote some arrangement to which Germany could be a party, by which she could be assured that no aggressive or hostile policy would be pursued against her or her allies by France, Russia, and ourselves, jointly or separately. I have desired this and worked for it”—

The statement was never more true—

“as far as I could, through the last Balkan crisis and Germany having a corresponding object, our relations sensibly improved. The idea has hitherto been too Utopian to form the subject of definite proposals, but if this present crisis, so much more acute than any that Europe has gone through for generations, be safely passed, I am hopeful that the relief and reaction which will follow may make possible some more definite rapprochement between the Powers than has been possible hitherto.”

That document, in my opinion, states clearly, in temperate and convincing language the attitude of this Government. Can any one who reads it fail to appre-

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ciate the tone of obvious sincerity and earnestness which underlies it; can any one honestly doubt that the Government of this country in spite of great provocation—and I regard the proposals made to us as proposals which we might have thrown aside without consideration and almost without answer—can any one doubt that in spite of great provocation the right hon. gentleman, who had already earned the title—and no one ever more deserved it—of Peace Maker of Europe, persisted to the very last moment of the last hour in that beneficent but unhappily frustrated purpose. I am entitled to say, and I do so on behalf of this country—I speak not for a party, I speak for the country as a whole—that we made every effort any Government could possibly make for peace. But this war has been forced upon us. What is it we are fighting for? Every one knows, and no one knows better than the Government the terrible incalculable suffering, economic, social, personal and political, which war, and especially a war between the Great Powers of the world must entail. There is on man amongst us sitting upon this bench in these trying days—more trying perhaps than any body of statesmen for a hundred years have had to pass through, there is not a man amongst us who has not, during the whole of that time, had clearly before his vision the almost unequalled suffering which war, even in just cause, must bring about, not only to the peoples who are for the moment living in this country and in the other countries of the world, but to posterity and to the whole prospects of European civilization. Every step we took with that vision before our eyes, and with a sense of responsibility which it is impossible to describe. Unhappily, if in spite of all our efforts to keep the peace, and with that full and overpowering consciousness of the result, if the issue be decided in favour of war, we have, nevertheless, thought it to be the duty as well as the interest of this country to go to war, the House may be well assured it was because we believe, and I am certain the country will believe, we are unsheathing our sword in a just cause.

If I am asked what we are fighting for I reply in two sentences. In the first place to fulfil a solemn international obligation, an obligation which, if it had been entered into between private persons in the ordinary concerns of life, would have been regarded as an obligation not only of law but of honour, which no self-respecting man could possibly have repudiated. I say, secondly, we are fighting to vindicate the principle which, in these days when force, material force, sometimes seems to be the dominant influence and factor in the development of mankind, we are fighting to vindicate the principle that small nationalities are not to be crushed, in defiance of international good faith, by the arbitrary will of a strong and overmastering Power. I do not believe any nation ever entered into a great controversy—and this is one of the greatest history will ever know with a clearer conscience and stronger conviction that it is fighting, not for aggression, not for the maintenance even of its own selfish interest, but that it is fighting in defence of principles, the maintenance of which is vital to the civilisation of the world. With a full conviction, not only of the wisdom and justice, but of the obligations which lay upon us to challenge this great issue, we are entering into the struggle. Let us now make sure that all the resources, not only of this United Kingdom, but of the vast Empire of which it is the centre, shall be thrown into the scale, and it is that that object may be adequately secured, that I am now about to ask this Committee—to make the very unusual demand upon it—to give the Government a Vote of Credit of £100,000,000. I am not going, and I am sure the Committee do not wish it, into the technical distinctions between Votes of Credit and Supplementary Estimates and all the rarities and refinements which arise in that connection. There is a much higher point of view than that. If it were necessary, I could justify, upon purely technical grounds, the course we propose to adopt, but I am not going to do so, because I think it would be foreign to the temper and disposition of the Committee. There is one thing to which I do call attention, that is, the Title and Heading of the Bill. As a rule, in the past Votes of this kind have been taken simply for naval and military operations, but we have thought it right to ask the Committee to give us its confidence in the extension of the traditional area of Votes of

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Credit so that this money which we are asking them to allow us to expend may be applied not only for strictly naval and military operations, but to assist the food supplies, promote the continuance of trade, industry, business, and communications, whether by means of insurance or indemnity against risk or otherwise, for the relief of distress, and generally for all expenses arising out of the existence of a state of war. I believe the Committee will agree with us that it was wise to extend the area of the Vote of Credit so as to include all these various matters. It gives the Government a free hand. Of course, the Treasury will account for it, and any expenditure that takes place will be subject to the approval of the House. I think it would be a great pity—in fact, a great disaster—if, in a crisis of this magnitude, we were not enabled to make provision—provision far more needed now than it was under the simpler conditions that prevailed in the old days—for all the various ramifications and developments of expenditure which the existence of a state of war between the great Powers of Europe must entail on any one of them.

I am asking also in my character of Secretary of State for War—a position which I held until this morning—for a Supplementary Estimate for men for the Army. Perhaps the Committee will allow me for a moment just to say on that personal matter that I took upon myself the office of Secretary of State for War under conditions, upon which I need not go back but which are fresh in the minds of everyone, in the hope and with the object that the conditions of things in the Army, which all of us deplored, might speedily be brought to an end and complete confidence re-established. I believe that is the case; in fact, I know it to be. There is no more loyal and united body, no body in which the spirit and habit of discipline are more deeply ingrained and cherished than in the British Army. Glad as I should have been to continue the work of that office, and I would have done so under normal conditions, it would not be fair to the Army, it would not be just to the country, that any Minister should divide his attention between that Department and another, still less that the First Minister of the Crown, who has to look into the affairs of all departments and who is ultimately responsible for the whole policy of the Cabinet, should give, as he could only give, perfunctory attention to the affairs of our Army in a great war. I am very glad to say that a very distinguished soldier and administrator, in the person of Lord Kitchener, with that great public spirit and patriotism that everyone would expect from him, at my request stepped into the breach. Lord Kitchener, as every one knows, is not a politician. His association with the Government as a Member of the Cabinet for this purpose must not be taken as in any way identifying him with any set of political opinions. He has, at a great public emergency, responded to a great public call, and I am certain he will have with him, in the discharge of one of the most arduous tasks that has ever fallen upon a Minister, the complete confidence of all parties and all opinions.

I am asking on his behalf for the Army, power to increase the number of men of all ranks, in addition to the number already voted, by no less than 500,000. I am certain the Committee will not refuse its sanction, for we are encouraged to ask for it not only by our own sense of the gravity and the necessities of the case, but by the knowledge that India is prepared to send us certainly two Divisions, and that every one of our self-governing Dominions, spontaneously and unasked, has already tendered to the utmost limits of their possibilities, both in men and in money, every help they can afford to the Empire in a moment of need. Sir, the Mother Country must set the example, while she responds with gratitude and affection to those filial overtures from the outlying members of her family.

Sir, I will say no more. This is not an occasion for controversial discussion. In all that I have said, I believe I have not gone, either in the statement of our case or in my general description of the provision we think it necessary to make, beyond the strict bounds of truth. It is not my purpose—it is not the purpose of any patriotic man—to inflame feeling, to indulge in rhetoric, to excite international animosities. The occasion is far too grave for that. We have a great duty to perform, we have a great

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trust to fulfil, and confidently we believe that Parliament and the country will enable us to do it.

MR. BONAR LAW: No Minister has ever fulfilled a duty more responsible or in regard to which the responsibility was more acutely felt than that which has just been fulfilled by the right hon. Gentleman. This is not a time for speech making, and I should have been quite ready to leave the statement which he has given to the Committee as the expression of the view, not of a party but of a nation. But as this, I think, will be the only opportunity which will be given for expressing the views of a large section of this Committee, I feel that I am bound to make clear to the Committee and to the country what is the attitude of His Majesty's Opposition on this question. There are two things which I desire to impress upon the Committee. The first is that we have dreaded war and have longed for peace as strongly as any Member of this Committee; and the second is that in our belief we are in a state of war against our will, and that we, as a nation, have done everything in our power to prevent such a condition of things arising. When this crisis first arose I confess I was one of those who had the hope that even then, though a European conflagration took place, we might be able to stay out of it. I held that hope strongly, but in a short time I became convinced of this, that into this war we should inevitably be drawn, and that it really was a question, and a question only, whether we should enter it honourably or be dragged into it with dishonour. I remember that on the first occasion after the retirement of my right hon. Friend, when I had to speak on foreign affairs, I made this statement, which perhaps is wrong, though I do not think so even yet. I said that if ever war arose between Great Britain and Germany it would not be due to inevitable causes, for I did not believe in inevitable war. I said it would be due to human folly. It is due to human folly, and to human wickedness, but neither the folly nor the wickedness is here. What other course was open to us? It is quite true, as the Foreign Secretary explained to the House the other day, that we were under no formal obligation to take part in such a struggle, but every Member in this House knows that the Entente meant this in the minds of this Government and of every other Government, that if any of the three Powers were attacked aggressively the others would be expected to step in to give their aid. The question, therefore, to my mind was this: Was this war in any way provoked by those who will now be our allies? No one who has read the White Paper can hesitate to answer that question. I am not going to go into it even as fully as the Prime Minister has done, but I would remind the House of this, that in this White Paper is contained the statement made by the German Ambassador, I think, at Vienna, that Russia was not in a condition and could not go to war, and in the same letter are found these words:—

“As for Germany, she knew very well what she was about in backing up Austria-Hungary in this matter.”

Everyone for years has known that the key to peace or war lay in Berlin. Everyone knew it, and at this crisis there is no one who can doubt that Berlin, if it had chosen, could have prevented this terrible conflict. I am afraid that the miscalculation which was made about Brussels was made also about us. The dispatch which the right hon. Gentleman referred to is a dispatch of a nature that I, at least, believe would not have been addressed to Great Britain if it had been believed that our hands were free, and that we held the position which we had always held before. That, at least, is my belief. Now what does this mean? We are fighting, as the Prime Minister said, for the honour, and with the honour is bound up always the interest, of our country. But we are fighting also for the whole basis of the civilisation for which we stand, and for which Europe stands. I do not wish, any more than the Prime Minister, to inflame passion, and I only ask the House to consider this one aspect. Look at the way Belgium is being treated to-day. There is a report—if it is not true now, it may be true to-morrow—that the city of Liege is attacked by German troops, and that civilians, as in the days of the middle ages, are fighting for their hearths and homes against trained

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troops. How has that been brought about? In a state of war, war must be waged, but remember that this plan is not of to-day or of yesterday. It has been long matured. The Germans knew that they would have others to face, and they were ready to take the course which they took the other day of saying to Belgium, "Destroy your independence and allow our troops to go through, or we will come down upon you with a might which it is impossible for you to resist." If we had allowed that to be done, our position as one of the great nations of the world, and our honour as one of the nations of the world, would, in my opinion, have been gone. This is no small struggle. This is the greatest, perhaps, that this country has ever been engaged in, and the issue is uncertain. It is Napoleonism once again. Thank heaven, so far as we know, there is no Napoleon.

I am not going to say anything more about the causes of the war, for I do not desire to encourage controversy on this subject. But, if I may be allowed to say so, I should like to say this, that I read yesterday with real pleasure an article in a paper which does not generally commend itself to me, the "Manchester Guardian." In that article it still held that the war ought not to have been entered into, but it took this view, that that was a question for history, and that now we were in it, there was only one question for us, and that was to bring it to a successful issue. I have felt sympathy, far more than at any other time, for the Prime Minister and for the Foreign Secretary. I can imagine nothing more terrible than that the Foreign Secretary should have a feeling that perhaps he has brought this country into an unnecessary war. No feeling can be worse. I can say this, and whether we are right or wrong, the whole House agrees with it I am sure, that that is a burden which the right hon. Gentleman can carry with a good conscience, and that every one of us can put up unhesitatingly this prayer, may God defend the right.

I should like, if I may to go to another topic—this is the only opportunity I shall have, and I think it is worth saying—and to ask the House to consider the conditions under which this war is going to be carried on. I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister say the other day in answer to a speech by the hon. Member (Mr. Arthur Anderson), and he has developed it in describing the terms of this Vote of Credit, that he realised, as we all must realise, that in a country situated like ours the development of industry and the supply of food at home is just as much an operation of war as is the conduct of our armed forces. I do not wish to minimise our difficulties, but I am quite sure, as sure as I can be of anything, that there is no danger of a scarcity of food, and that the only danger is the fear of scarcity of food. Everyone who has been in business knows that what causes panic prices is not actual scarcity at the time, but the fear of scarcity coming, and this is a case where every one of us must do what he can to impress upon the people of this country that there is, as I believe, no danger. Here I should like, if I may, to give one warning note. Remember, at least I believe it, this war, unexpected by us, is not unexpected by our enemy. I shall be greatly surprised if we do not find that at first on our trade routes there is a destruction of our property which might raise a panic. That is inevitable, I think, at the outset. Let us be prepared for it, and let us realise that it has no bearing whatever on the ultimate course of the war. There is something else which I think, if I am right, it is important to say. We had a discussion yesterday about credit. That is the basis of successful war, as it is of every branch of industry at this moment. I think the Government have taken the right course. I have followed it closely, and I know that they have been supported by those who best understand the situation. I think the danger is minimised as much as it can be. But, after all, the question of credit really depends on what we believe is going to be the effect of this war upon our trade and our industry. I hope the House will not think I am too optimistic, but I do think there is a danger of our taking too gloomy a view of what the effects may be, and by taking that gloomy view helping to bring about the very state of affairs that we wish to avoid.

Again, I wish to guard myself against seeming to be too hopeful. But let us look at the facts as if we were examining a chess problem. If we keep the command of the

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sea, what is going to happen? It all depends on that. I admit that if that goes the position is gloomy indeed, but of that I have no fear. If we keep the command of the sea, what is going to happen? Five-sixths of our production is employed in the Home trade. What goes abroad is very important, for, of course, if the population which supplied the sixth were thrown out of work, that would react upon the Home trade. But, after all, the total amount of our exports to all the European countries which are now at war is only a small part of our total exports. There is here no question of fiscal policy. We are far beyond that. It is a fact. Our total exports to all the countries which are now at war do not, in my belief—I have not looked into the figures—exceed our exports to India and Australia taken alone. We shall have free trade, if the sea routes are maintained, with the Colonies and with the whole of the American Continent, and, unfortunately for them, both our allies our enemies will not be competing with us in those markets. Look at it as a problem, and I think we have a right to believe, not that trade will be good, but that it will be much more nearly normal than is generally believed. I hope the House will not think that a useless thing to say. There is one thing more which I would desire to say. This is the affair of the Nation. Everyone would desire to help. There is a great deal of work to be done which cannot be done by the Government. I was glad that the right hon. Gentleman the Prime Minister has already asked the co-operation of my right hon. Friend the Member for West-Birmingham and my right hon. Friend the Member for the Strand. They gave it gladly. But I am sure that I speak not only for this bench, but for the whole of our party, when I say that the Government has only got to requisition any one of us and we will serve it and our country to the best of our ability.

DOCUMENTS

RELATIVE TO THE

EUROPEAN WAR

(SUPPLEMENT)

DESPATCH FROM HIS MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR AT BERLIN RESPECTING
THE RUPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE
GERMAN GOVERNMENT.

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DESPATCH FROM HIS MAJESTY'S AMBASSADOR AT BERLIN RESPECTING
THE RUPTURE OF DIPLOMATIC RELATIONS WITH THE GERMAN
GOVERNMENT.*Sir E. Goschen to Sir Edward Grey.*

LONDON, August 8, 1914.

SIR,—In accordance with the instructions contained in your telegram of the 4th instant* I called upon the Secretary of State that afternoon and inquired, in the name of His Majesty's Government, whether the Imperial Government would refrain from violating Belgian neutrality. Herr von Jagow at once replied that he was sorry to say that his answer must be "No," as, in consequence of the German troops having crossed the frontier that morning, Belgian neutrality had been already violated. Herr von Jagow again went into the reasons why the Imperial Government had been obliged to take this step, namely, that they had to advance into France by the quickest and easiest way, so as to be able to get well ahead with their operations and endeavour to strike some decisive blow as early as possible. It was a matter of life and death for them, as if they had gone by the more southern route they could not have hoped, in view of the paucity of roads and the strength of the fortresses, to have got through without formidable opposition entailing great loss of time. This loss of time would have meant time gained by the Russians for bringing up their troops to the German frontier. Rapidity of action was the great German asset, while that of Russia was an inexhaustible supply of troops. I pointed out to Herr von Jagow that this *fait accompli* of the violation of the Belgian frontier rendered, as he would readily understand, the situation exceedingly grave, and I asked him whether there was not still time to draw back and avoid possible consequences, which both he and I would deplore. He replied that, for the reasons he had given me, it was now impossible for them to draw back.

During the afternoon I received your further telegram of the same date,† and, in compliance with the instructions therein contained, I again proceeded to the Imperial Foreign Office and informed the Secretary of State that unless the Imperial Government could give the assurance by 12 o'clock that night that they would proceed no further with their violation of the Belgian frontier and stop their advance, I had been instructed to demand my passports and inform the Imperial Government that His Majesty's Government would have to take all steps in their power to uphold the neutrality of Belgium and the observance of a treaty to which Germany was as much a party as themselves.

Herr von Jagow replied that to his great regret he could give no other answer than that which he had given me earlier in the day, namely, that the safety of the Empire rendered it absolutely necessary that the Imperial troops should advance through Belgium. I gave His Excellency a written summary of your telegram and, pointing out that you had mentioned 12 o'clock as the time when His Majesty's Government would expect an answer, asked him whether, in view of the terrible consequences which would necessarily ensue, it were not possible even at the last moment that their answer should be reconsidered. He replied that if the time given were even 24 hours or more, his answer must be the same. I said that in that case I should have to demand my passports. This interview took place at about 7 o'clock. In a short con-

* See "Miscellaneous, No. 6 (1914)," No. 153.

† See "Miscellaneous, No. 6 (1914)," No. 159.

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verset on which ensued Herr von Jagow expressed his poignant regret at the crumbling of his entire policy and that of the Chancellor, which had been to make friends with Great Britain and then, through Great Britain, to get closer to France. I said that this sudden end to my work in Berlin was to me also a matter of deep regret and disappointment, but that he must understand that under the circumstances and in view of our engagements, His Majesty's Government could not possibly have acted otherwise than they had done.

I then said that I should like to go and see the Chancellor, as it might be, perhaps the last time I should have an opportunity of seeing him. He begged me to do so. I found the Chancellor very agitated. His Excellency at once began a harangue, which lasted for about twenty minutes. He said that the step taken by His Majesty's Government was terrible to a degree; just for a word—"neutrality," a word which in war time had so often been disregarded—just for a scrap of paper Great Britain was going to make war on a kindred nation who desired nothing better than to be friends with her. All his efforts in that direction had been rendered useless by this last terrible step, and the policy to which, as I knew, he had devoted himself since his accession to office had tumbled down like a house of cards. What we had done was unthinkable; it was like striking a man from behind while he was fighting for his life against two assailants. He held Great Britain responsible for all the terrible events that might happen. I protested strongly against that statement, and said that, in the same way as he and Herr von Jagow wished me to understand that for strategical reasons it was a matter of life and death to Germany to advance through Belgium and violate the latter's neutrality, so I would wish him to understand that it was, so to speak, a matter of "life and death" for the honour of Great Britain that she should keep her solemn engagement to do her utmost to defend Belgium's neutrality if attacked. That solemn compact simply had to be kept, or what confidence could any one have in engagements given by Great Britain in the future? The Chancellor said, "But at what price will that compact have been kept. Has the British Government thought of that?" I hinted to His Excellency as plainly as I could that fear of consequences could hardly be regarded as an excuse for breaking solemn engagements, but his Excellency was so excited, so evidently overcome by the news of our action, and so little disposed to hear reason that I refrained from adding fuel to the flame by further argument. As I was leaving he said that the blow of Great Britain joining Germany's enemies was all the greater that almost up to the last moment he and his Government had been working with us and supporting our efforts to maintain peace between Austria and Russia. I said that this was part of the tragedy which saw the two nations fall apart just at the moment when the relations between them had been more friendly and cordial than they had been for years. Unfortunately, notwithstanding our efforts to maintain peace between Russia and Austria, the war had spread and had brought us face to face with a situation which, if we held to our engagements, we could not possibly avoid, and which unfortunately entailed our separation from our late fellow-workers. He would readily understand that no one regretted this more than I.

After this somewhat painful interview I returned to the embassy and drew up a telegraphic report of what had passed. This telegram was handed in at the Central Telegraph Office a little before 9 p.m. It was accepted by that office, but apparently never despatched.*

At about 9.30 p.m. Herr von Zimmermann, the Under-Secretary of State, came to see me. After expressing his deep regret that the very friendly official and personal relations between us were about to cease, he asked me casually whether a demand for passports was equivalent to a declaration of war. I said that such an authority on international law as he was known to be must know as well or better than I what was usual in such cases. I added that there were many cases where diplomatic relations had

*This telegram never reached the Foreign Office.

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been broken off and, nevertheless, war had not ensued; but that in this case he would have seen from my instructions, of which I had given Herr von Jagow a written summary, that His Majesty's Government expected an answer to a definite question by 12 o'clock that night and that in default of a satisfactory answer they would be forced to take such steps as their engagements required. Herr Zimmermann said that that was, in fact, a declaration of war, as the Imperial Government could not possibly give the assurance required either that night or any other night.

In the meantime, after Herr Zimmermann left me, a flying sheet, issued by the "Berliner Tageblatt," was circulated stating that Great Britain had declared war against Germany. The immediate result of this news was the assemblage of an exceedingly excited and unruly mob before His Majesty's Embassy. The small force of police which had been sent to guard the embassy was soon overpowered, and the attitude of the mob became more threatening. We took no notice of this demonstration as long as it was confined to noise, but when the crash of glass and the landing of cobble stones into the drawing-room, where we were all sitting, warned us that the situation was getting unpleasant, I telephoned to the Foreign Office an account of what was happening. Herr von Jagow at once informed the Chief of Police, and an adequate force of mounted police, sent with great promptness, very soon cleared the street. From that moment on we were well guarded, and no more direct unpleasantness occurred.

After order had been restored Herr von Jagow came to see me and expressed his most heartfelt regrets at what had occurred. He said that the behaviour of his countrymen had made him feel more ashamed than he had words to express. It was an indelible stain on the reputation of Berlin. He said that the flying sheet circulated in the streets had not been authorized by the Government; in fact, the Chancellor had asked him by telephone whether he thought that such a statement should be issued, and he had replied, "Certainly not, until the morning." It was in consequence of his decision to that effect that only a small force of police had been sent to the neighbourhood of the embassy, as he had thought that the presence of a large force would inevitably attract attention and perhaps lead to disturbances. It was the "pestilential 'Tageblatt,'" which had somehow got hold of the news, that had upset his calculations. He had heard rumours that the mob had been excited to violence by gestures made and missiles thrown from the embassy, but he felt sure that that was not true (I was able soon to assure him that the report had no foundation whatever), and even if it was, it was no excuse for the disgraceful scenes which had taken place. He feared that I would take home with me a sorry impression of Berlin manners in moments of excitement. In fact, no apology could have been more full and complete.

On the following morning, the 5th August, the Emperor sent one of His Majesty's aides-de-camp to me with the following message:—

"The Emperor has charged me to express to Your Excellency his regret for the occurrences of last night, but to tell you at the same time that you will gather from those occurrences an idea of the feelings of his people respecting the action of Great Britain in joining with other nations against her old allies of Waterloo. His Majesty also begs that you will tell the King that he has been proud of the titles of British Field-Marshal and British Admiral, but that in consequence of what has occurred he must now at once divest himself of those titles."

I would add that the above message lost none of its acerbity by the manner of its delivery.

On the other hand, I should like to state that I received all through this trying time nothing but courtesy at the hands of Herr von Jagow and the officials of the Imperial Foreign Office. At about 11 o'clock on the same morning Count Wedel handed

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me my passports—which I had earlier in the day demanded in writing—and told me that he had been instructed to confer with me as to the route which I should follow for my return to England. He said that he had understood that I preferred the route viâ the Hook of Holland to that viâ Copenhagen; they had therefore arranged that I should go by the former route, only I should have to wait till the following morning. I agreed to this, and he said that I might be quite assured that there would be no repetition of the disgraceful scenes of the preceding night as full precautions would be taken. He added that they were doing all in their power to have a restaurant car attached to the train, but it was rather a difficult matter. He also brought me a charming letter from Herr von Jagow couched in the most friendly terms. The day was passed in packing up such articles as time allowed.

The night passed quietly without any incident. In the morning a strong force of police was posted along the usual route to the Lehrter Station, while the embassy was smuggled away in taxi-cabs to the station by side streets. We there suffered no molestation whatever, and avoided the treatment meted out by the crowd to my Russian and French colleagues. Count Wedel met us at the station to say good-bye on behalf of Herr von Jagow and to see that all the arrangements ordered for our comfort had been properly carried out. A retired colonel of the Guards accompanied the train to the Dutch frontier, and was exceedingly kind in his efforts to prevent the great crowds which thronged the platforms at every station where we stopped from insulting us; but beyond the yelling of patriotic songs and a few jeers and insulting gestures we had really nothing to complain of during our tedious journey to the Dutch frontier.

Before closing this long account of our last days in Berlin I should like to place on record and bring to your notice the quite admirable behaviour of my staff under the most trying circumstances possible. One and all, they worked night and day with scarcely any rest, and I cannot praise too highly the cheerful zeal with which counsellor, naval and military attachés, secretaries, and the two young attachés buckled to their work and kept their nerve with often a yelling mob outside and inside hundreds of British subjects clamouring for advice and assistance. I was proud to have such a staff to work with, and feel most grateful to them all for the invaluable assistance and support, often exposing them to considerable personal risk, which they so readily and cheerfully gave to me.

I should also like to mention the great assistance rendered to us all by my American colleague, Mr. Gerard, and his staff. Undeterred by the hooting and hisses with which he was often greeted by the mob on entering and leaving the embassy, His Excellency came repeatedly to see me to ask how he could help us and to make arrangements for the safety of stranded British subjects. He extricated many of these from extremely difficult situations at some personal risk to himself, and his calmness and *savoir-faire* and his firmness in dealing with the Imperial authorities gave full assurance that the protection of British subjects and interests could not have been left in more efficient and able hands.

I have, &c.,

W. E. GOSCHEN.



